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AF Secretary Roche pays visit to Wright Patt, AFRL

by 1st Lt. Dani Burrows, ASC Public Affairs

WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Ohio — Secretary of the Air Force James G. Roche completed his first visit to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base April 30th, saying he was impressed by “our Air Force people.”

“I’m always struck by just how super our Air Force people are and the kind of equipment and technology we’re developing. It really gives me the confidence that we have the ability to beat anybody,” he said. “You work on systems that make a difference.”

As an example, Roche cited the F-22 program managed here.

“Clearly, I think the F-22 is terribly important because of the features that have never been present before,” he said.

The F-22 Raptor, the Air Force’s newest fighter, is scheduled to be operational in 2005. The Air Force’s current production plan calls for 339 Raptors. But, according to a report in Wednesday’s Washington Times, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has instructed the Air Force to study cutting the program to 180 aircraft.

According to Roche, the Air Force needs at least 339.

“Once the capabilities of the F-22 are demonstrated, by being an operational aircraft, the demand for the aircraft will be very much like the demand for the C-17,” he said.

Roche’s two-day visit included Air Force Materiel Command headquarters, Aeronautical Systems Center’s Doolittle Acquisition Management Complex, Air Force Research Laboratory, Air Force Institute of Technology and the Air Force Museum.

“I’m thrilled our top Air Force official was able to visit us and see firsthand how we operate — how we provide air combat power and support our warriors,” said Lt. Gen. Dick Reynolds, ASC commander. “I am extremely proud of Team Wright-Patterson and all the people who work here.”

And the secretary said he liked what he saw.

If the Air Force had to redesign a center for advanced thinking, early development, development, sustainment and aging aircraft, he said it would be built just like it is today.

He said that if he were a young engineer, he’d have many reasons for wanting to work for the Air Force. “After what I’ve



Dr. James Roche, Secretary of the Air Force; Gen. Lester Lyles, commander of Air Force Materiel Command; and Maj. Gen. Paul Nielsen, commander of the Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL) watch a demonstration during a recent visit to AFRL’s Materials and Manufacturing Directorate. (Air Force photo by 2nd Lt. Morgan J. O’Brien III)

seen here, I’d probably want to come here to work on neat things,” he said.

Focusing on the war on terrorism, Roche said, “Secretary Rumsfeld again this past week made the point that this is a long conflict. I believe we have to organize ourselves for something that is long term.”

He pointed to the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, another program managed here, and lessons learned on the battlefield.

“One of the things we’ve learned in this current conflict is that by using the unmanned vehicles, we’ve learned where they have an advantage and where they don’t have an advantage,” he said. “We understand more and more that there are things that are in the domain of a pilot’s understanding that are best done in an aircraft compared to a two-dimensional representation on the ground.”

He also touched on funding stability. “I agree that one of the best things we can do is try and get some stability,” he

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said, adding that budget stability would allow the Air Force to plan better over time.

“AFMC has lived up to its reputation, which it’s had for a long time, and that’s to get things to the warrior as fast as possible and in as good of a condition as possible,” said Roche. @